



News Release

For immediate release: September 2, 2009

(09-140)

Contacts: Tim Church, Communications Office

360-236-4077, 360-534-0068 (pgr.)

Adult smoking drops again, saving lives and \$2.8 billion in future health care costs

Health department focusing efforts on reaching groups still smoking at higher rates

OLYMPIA— Washington’s adult smoking rate has hit a new low for the sixth consecutive year. Results from the state’s most recent survey show the smoking rate has dropped to 15.3 percent — down from 16.5 percent the previous year. Washington has the sixth lowest smoking rate in the nation and remains well below the national rate of 18.4 percent.

“Tobacco prevention and control is a priority in our state, and it’s paying off. Fewer people who smoke means fewer people suffering or dying from tobacco-related diseases. It also means our state will save billions of dollars in future health care costs,” said Governor Chris Gregoire. “We must continue to look for ways to reach people who are addicted to this deadly habit, and keep kids from ever starting so they’ll live longer, healthier lives.”

The adult smoking rate in Washington has dropped more than 30 percent since the state began its Tobacco Prevention and Control Program in 2000. There are now 295,000 fewer people smoking in the state and an estimated 98,000 people will be spared early, tobacco-related deaths. The decline in smoking will save an estimated \$2.8 billion in future health care costs. The state has reached its 10-year goal of reducing the adult smoking rate to 16.5 percent or less by 2010. With that the Department of Health has established a new goal of reducing adult smoking to 14 percent or less by 2013.

The department is refocusing efforts to help groups still smoking at higher rates. There are 770,000 adults who smoke in Washington; the majority are from either lower income or lower educational backgrounds. The smoking rate for people with low income is 31 percent; that’s more than three times as high as the 10 percent smoking rate for people with higher income.

“Tobacco use has a very real impact on peoples’ lives — particularly those with fewer resources,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “People often smoke because it seems like their only break from many of life’s challenges. Over the past year we’ve spent a lot of time talking with and learning from low-income smokers so we can find better ways to provide them the support they need to quit.”

—More—

In June the Department of Health launched the multi-media “Dear Me” campaign, featuring people who smoke from around Washington writing a letter to themselves about their struggle to quit. The campaign directs people to the Washington State Tobacco Quit Line (1-800-QUIT-NOW, 1-877-2NO-FUME in Spanish) and [Quitline.com](http://www.Quitline.com) (www.Quitline.com) for free quit support.

To accompany the launch of the “Dear Me” campaign, Quitline.com was redesigned. People who visit the site can see the “Dear Me” videos, write their own “Dear Me” letter, and read those of other tobacco users. The site also features videos of quit coaches talking about what happens when people call the quit line and offering quit tips for those not ready to call. Quitline.com also has an interactive quit plan and quizzes designed to test knowledge of the quit process. Information and videos of quit coaches are available in Spanish.

The Department of Health is working to reach people with lower incomes and educational backgrounds through programs like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and Head Start. And the Medicaid program provides free quit help to eligible clients, including prescription medications, if appropriate. Washington is also one of the founding partners of the national “Become an Ex” campaign. Led by the American Legacy Foundation, the program targets groups that continue to smoke at higher rates.

People in Washington can receive free quit support by calling the toll-free Tobacco Quit Line. Since the new federal tobacco tax took effect in April, the quit line has had an unprecedented number of calls. Callers speak with a trained quit coach who works with them to identify smoking triggers, provides information about coping with withdrawal symptoms, helps develop a personal plan to quit, and sends a packet of quit materials. More than 125,000 people in Washington have called the quit line for help since it opened for business in November 2000.

Washington is a recognized leader in tobacco prevention and control. Before the tobacco program began, our state had the 20th lowest smoking rate in the nation; now we are ranked sixth. The top 10 states, in order, beginning with the lowest rate are: **(1)** Utah, **(2)** California, **(3)** New Jersey, **(4)** Maryland, **(5)** Hawaii, **(6) Washington**, **(7)** Arizona, Connecticut (tied), **(9)** Massachusetts, **(10)** Oregon.

###